BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:  TOM SCHREIBER, 39, home gardener

Thomas Russell Schreiber was born in Baltimore, Maryland on December 16, 1939, the second of three boys. Tom is of German and English ancestry. He spent the first 28 years of his life in Baltimore; he worked part-time while attending college for three years and worked for Western Electric Company.

In about 1967 Tom moved to California and spent two years in Los Angeles and Santa Cruz. Since 1970, Tom has lived in Waipio Valley, cultivating an extensive and beautiful garden and yard, raising chickens, and working in farmers' taro fields. He also enjoys fishing. Tom is the longest residing young haole in Waipio Valley.
Tape No. 4-53A-1-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mr. Tom Schreiber (TS)

June 27, 1978

Waipio Valley, Big Island

BY: Vivien Lee (VL) and Yukie Yoshinaga (YY)

[NOTE: Tom requested that we include a preface to his interview indicating that these are, in part, recollections of events that occurred eight years ago. They are recorded here in the interest of future generations who will want to know the full history of Waipio Valley. Since these events occurred, there has evolved a mutual understanding and respect between the local people and the haole "hippies."

VL: This is an interview with Mr. Tom Schreiber. Today is June 27, 1978. We're at his home in Waipio Valley.

Okay, can you tell us your full name?

TS: Thomas Russell Schreiber.

VL: And when and where you were born.

TS: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1939. December 16, 1939.

VL: I was too. I was born December 7, in Baltimore. Not in 1939. Okay. Can you tell us about the circumstances surrounding your first visit to Waipio?

TS: Well, my first visit was my final visit. I never left. (Laughs) I was in California at the time, living in Santa Cruz. And I was just in an adventurous mood. And I wanted to come to Hawaii, but I didn't know where to go. So I went to the library in Santa Cruz and read about various places in Hawaii. And there was a book, a small book, written by a lady whose name slips my mind right now. (Isabella Bird, Six Months in the Sandwich Isles) It was written around the turn of the century and she told all about her horseback trip all through Waimanu, or Waipio, and all.

YY: She was Isabella Bird?
TS: Yes. So that inspired me to come here. Mainly, those watermelons. They grew wild. They don't grow wild anymore because of the fruitfly. So, we got a ticket, $75 one way, standby, and came up here the next day. And I've been here ever since.

VL: Who is "we"?

TS: Oh, Michael Tonini. He moved out about a year and a half later. He's married a local girl and has children. He lives in Maui right now. And I decided to stay here since...I lived on the beach for four months. That was when you could do that. It was very nice then.

VL: What year was that when you first came?


VL: Wait a second.

[Taping stops, then resumes.]

VL: What were you doing in California, before you came?

TS: Just living. As far as a job, I didn't really have a job. I did part-time painting and things like that. But just experiencing life. That was about it. Then I became...the realization of God hit me, and that sort of changed my whole life. Then everything seemed to be like a red carpet. It was just laid down. I get the thought...like I had a vision that I was going to come here, oh, about a year before I even decided to come here. Ever since then, it's just been one thing after another. Like everything laid right down. And, the real reason that I came here was to learn more about God, which is the Truth, that I have. And now I realize it'll be forever. Because you just learn those things forever and ever. That's eternity.

VL: And right now you're not speaking of God in terms of church, or going to church?

TS: No. Not as far as I'm concerned. But to others that's God. But I lived that in my earlier part of my life. Because I learned what the church had to teach, which was very limited. Then I became interested in the real truth, or more of the truth, I should say, not the real truth. And I was just led here. And gardening became an interest to occupy my mind. I was just being a physical, material being.

VL: When you first saw the valley, for real, what were your impressions?

TS: "Oh, this is home." That was my first thought. "What a nice home."
VL: How was living on the beach for four months?

TS: Beautiful. Just wonderful. The local people, we had a little hard time communicating at first. But that was mainly from... just they didn't understand us. They had never met a white, long haired haole before.

VL: Were you the first ones down here?

TS: Yes. There wasn't anyone lived down here, except a couple local people. And they lived near the bottom of the hill. Gosh, back here, you couldn't even see the house from the road. And in parts, you couldn't even see the road. It was just the trail. They didn't farm over here. Then Harrison [Kanekoa] turned us on to the place on Halloween.

VL: How did you meet him?

TS: Mike met him. Mike was real adventurous, as far as pioneering goes. He had ants in his pants, he couldn't sit still at all. He was up the hill [to Kukuihaele] two times a day, rain or shine. I was just sort of airing out. I just read and just enjoyed what was here. And he met Harrison just through his runnings around.

But living on the beach was really pleasant. We could leave our stuff there. No one would bother. For weeks at a time. Then we sort of became the mascot, as I understand. People would come to the top of the hill [the Waipio Lookout] and they'd look to see if we were still there. I ran into that accidentally one day. Some man was describing, "the two boys that live on the beach. Can you imagine?"

I went, "Oh, yes, I'm one of them."

"You are?"

VL: Did you have much contact with the local people?

TS: No, not too much at all. The Peace Corps was here then. They were completely amazed at what we were doing. Because they were going to school to learn what we were just doing.

VL: What did you do for food?

TS: Oh, this valley's a supermarket.

(Laughter)

TS: If you know what to eat. Old John Kahele put it right on the head, "If you starve down here, you're stupid." It just abounds with food. No fear of starving at all.
VL: Did you want to continue living at the beach, after that four months? Like, why did you move here [Waimanu side of Waipio Valley]?

TS: We had been over on the Kona side for a couple weeks. And when we came back, the winter ocean—which automatically becomes rougher—had come in and taken away the beach. And along with it, our camp. So that was that. But John Kahele was on the beach waiting for us, and he asked us if we were ready to move back here. And we didn't believe him at first. But we found out that we could live in one of these two houses here. Legitimately. So we took on the job, this is a caretaking job. And our job was to just keep the place clear and clean. No money involved.

VL: No rent, lease?

TS: No rent, no pay. Just live here, which was plenty. That's the way it still is.

VL: What did this place look like, when you first moved in?

TS: Well, I said that you couldn't see it from the road. It was quite thick guava, haole koa, brush. Brush was almost to the roof of the house. I fell off that wall over there without even realizing there was a wall there. That was a shock. The trees were all overgrown. After we got the vines off the trees, they hardly had a leaf on them. But they sure gave us a tremendous harvest for thanks the following year.

VL: How long did it take you to get it looking somewhat like it looks today?

TS: Oh wow. Well, we got it cleared, because I remember we planted our first large vegetable garden on March the 15th. And we came on October 31, or Halloween. So it took us that long to hack down the immediate area right around the house. That wasn't counting up in the back or anything. And then the landscaping job, I did years later. I really didn't really get into gardening and landscaping, shall we say, till after Mike left. When Mike was here, we did another thing, we did a lot of hunting. Fishing, hiking, that type of stuff. Hunting, I mean ocean, not pigs. Diving and stuff like that. Plus, we holoholo-ed somewhat. But not very much. Maybe couple days a month.

VL: What would that entail?

TS: Well, we would just hitchike around the island. And come what may. And that was fun. Go to see people in Kona and Hilo. We had friends all around. It was unique to live in Waipio. Everyone thought it's just like a picnic to come to Waipio. And when you live there, you're a celebrity almost. As I found out.

VL: Who was the next person to come in and live in the valley? The next haole.
TS: John Ford and Mike Johnson. They came in the...not too long afterwards. It was before Christmas. Because Mike was killed just before that. Or was it the following year? No, no. No, it was that. It was before, it was just a couple months later.

VL: This was of 1970?

TS: Yeah. John Ford, and his partner Mike Johnson. And they had an accident on the hill.

VL: What happened?

TS: The jeep they were riding in went over the cliff. And Mike died. John lived.

VL: And John's still here, right?

TS: Yeah, he's up top [in Kukuiahele]. Then Dave and Bill, Dave McGaw and Bill Luhnow came. They came in the following April [1971].

VL: How did you feel about having new people come in and live here?

TS: Oh, we were all for it. In fact, it got to a point that we were ready to move because we couldn't get anyone to come down here anymore. After Dave and Bill, then there was a long pause. No one, especially females, just no way. So we were, after our first year, we were almost ready to move. Then, I think, Lynn came.

VL: Uchigakiuchi?

TS: Yeah. Then, after her, then that sort of opened the door.

VL: So, maybe, if she hadn't of come, you would've been elsewhere now?

TS: Very good possibility. Well actually, it was just people. In those days, you didn't even have cars come here at all. Nothing. Except a couple check ups. The locals coming down to check up on us.

VL: Have their feelings towards you changed over the years? The local people.

TS: Oh yes. In those days, in fact, I understand....that they wanted to kill us for living in their sacred valley. In fact, there was an incident in that first year, of killing in Honokaa which revolved around us living here in Waipio. Which, I could give you names and everything. But I don't think you want them. But it was just....that sort of reached the apex. And then the people realized that they didn't want that, the local people. And then they changed everything, and everyone. Then, the first few visits, they brought their guns and dogs....but they could have been going hunting pigs.
VL: To look, or to talk to you?

TS: To look. And then they came to talk with their guns and dogs. But I feel they didn't trust us. In fact, I remember one of them, we were pulling out guava stumps at the time. He wanted to help us, but he had his gun. But yet, he wouldn't put his gun down to help us. Which was kind of funny.

VL: Now, didn't that kind of attitude make you want to move out?

TS: No, that was the spiritual thing within. I didn't even entertain any thoughts whatsoever. I felt completely innocent of anything. I didn't do anything so I felt that that's their problem, not my problem. And I don't know if that would be the same way today. But back then it was. I was very....in fact, I remember when the boy was killed in Honokaa, and the other one was wounded. The police came several times to warn us to either get out or be careful. But it seemed to just go over us. It didn't seem to bother us out here. It wasn't us, it was somebody else's trip.

YY: How did those people with guns and dogs react to your landlord for allowing you to stay here?

TS: He was having problems also. Very heavy problems. He was getting phone calls all hours of the nights from all kinds of people. From high officials, police chiefs, all the way down to local neighbors. He was threatened. He had threats on us, made to him many times. I'd forgotten all this. I hadn't remembered all this until now.

There wasn't much in the way of violence, as far as we go. In fact, I think the most violence that ever happened to us was one of the "cannonball" boys threw a guava at us. Which one, I wasn't sure, it didn't matter. We were just amazed. We thought the guava had flew off the tree by itself. Because we didn't see anyone. And then they walked around, came around the corner in their vehicle.

VL: But that attitude changed, after a while?

TS: Yeah, it changed. It seemed to....after the killing, then when they had the accident on the hill, things really started to change. Because John Ford climbed, crawled half way up that hill. And he was injured rather severely. He had huge cuts. And he went to the first, second, third house....third or fourth house. And no one would help him. Either they weren't home or played not home or something. Then he finally got to the one house. They shut the door in his face. So the next house was like a quarter of a mile away. And he had to go crawl that distance to get help. Well, that was just before Christmas and it was just too much shock for the local people. They just had too much compassion for people. They just felt that that was just beyond. So I understand they had quite a reprimand in the store up top. And then the tide was changed. And things started to come more mellow, they had more sensitivity for us.
VL: Wow, that's heavy.

TS: Yeah, it was really something.

VL: That accident was 1971?

TS: No, that was latter 1970. They came, evidently, it was shortly after we moved here. So it was probably somewhere in the beginning of November. And then the accident was somewhere...the middle of December. So that happened. It seemed like it was a longer space, but it was 1970. Because Dave and Bill came in the following year.

VL: Now days, do you have much contact with local people?

TS: Oh yeah. Oh yes. All the time.

VL: Well, what form of contact?

TS: Oh, I'm just one of the neighbors. That's all. It's just everything's normal now. I stick to myself a lot. Because of just the space where I'm in. I'm trying to purify myself. And, you don't go backyard fencing it when you're trying to purify yourself.

VL: By that, you mean gossiping and....

TS: Yes. And that's a lot what happens down here. Whether it's innocent gossip or....I don't think I've ever been to a session, talk story session, where someone isn't brought in to us and talked about somehow. And I always find myself doing it too, so rather than get into it, I just sort of stay out.

VL: How about contact with the other haoles in the valley?

TS: Oh yeah. I know all of them. There's an age difference here. I don't think the exact same way they do. I don't know whether it's age or whatever you want to call it. But, they do mostly the things that I did 15 years ago. And I don't feel like doing it anymore. I mean, like, if you go visit somebody, you sit down and drink or smoke some pot or something. I just don't feel like doing that anymore. I do, it's a time and place for it. It's just not a daily routine. So. And they're all into their own trips. So, I guess, as I said, I stick mostly to myself.

VL: Do you ever get lonely?

TS: Momentarily. But all I have to do is think about moving somewhere and then that leaves me. As far as being "somewhere," I mean to the Mainland or something like that. Back to the city. And I'm not lonely anymore. (Laughs)
VL: Can you tell us a little about the foods that you raise, and how much, what you're raising and what you do with it?

TS: Well, most of it's consumed by someone or something. Either me, neighbors, my chickens or cats. I sell the excess fruit if it's decent to sell. In fact, I sell excess anything if it's decent to sell.

VL: Where do you sell it?

TS: Since it's organic, I sell it to the health food stores. You get a better price.

VL: In Honokaa?

TS: Yes. Oranges, bananas. I don't sell papayas but they're crying for them. And actually, anything else organic. Anything. They'd just love to have it. Someday I'd like to too, but it just hasn't worked out that way yet. Farming some organic vegetables.

VL: Is this how you support yourself?

TS: Uh huh. Yeah. It doesn't cost very much to live here. Very minimum. I do receive food stamps. To be perfectly honest, I don't think the food stamp people would be happy if we didn't. They seemed to be concerned about our health and nutrition. And at times, I've gone and offered to take half the amount because I didn't use them all. And they said "all or nothing." And then, one time I said I didn't think that I should take them anymore. And they said that, "What are you going to eat?" They're just like mother away from home.

VL: How many chickens do you have?

TS: A dozen. Six hens and six roosters. It's not going to be a dozen for very long. The roosters are destined for the pot.

VL: About how many eggs do you get every day?

TS: Oh, three or four. Something like that. Some days, none.

VL: So, in terms of the food that you eat, what percentage do you have to buy?

TS: ....No more than five percent. Most of it, I grow. And I really wouldn't have to buy that five percent, but it's just that there are materialistic ways that we've been brought up in. Our love of cookies, candies, etc.

VL: Oh no.
TS: That's not what I spend all my money on, no. But I'm just using that as an example. My cookies and candies are things like dates and figs. And nuts, other than macadamia nuts. Things like that. Luxuries. Ahi, the fish, I buy that. Because we can't always go catch it.

VL: How often do you go fishing?

TS: Recently, not too much. Because I've been cutting down my meat intake. But now the summer's here. If the weather ever clears, I'll probably be at it again.

VL: Could you describe, like, a typical day for you?

TS: Oh sure. They're all about the same. I get up around six. Stand on my head, do a few yoga things. For about half an hour. Come out and water the houseplants, if they need watering, which usually they do. Oh, I forgot, immediately upon rising, it's the outhouse. Then, after watering the plants, I go to start my breakfast, which is fruit. I have fruit for breakfast. A very large fruit salad. Which consists of whatever is happening. Which this morning was mangoes, papayas, bananas. A peach from the yard. And a pineapple from the yard. And then, at the same time, the fruits that aren't so good, fruit flies, etc., rotten, I cut up for the chickens. Make them a big dish or a big pot full and dump that in there for them. Throw a few avocados out for the cats. Then I sit down to eat my breakfast. And at the same time, do some reading. On gardening books or some sort of truth, whatever.

Then I finish up all that around 10. Relax for a few minutes, and then start into my daily whatever. From digging the garden to cutting the lawn to...something caretaking here. This morning, I went up and gathered mangoes. Stopped over at Robert's and talked for a little while. Then came over and dug some of the garden up in the back.

Then I eat lunch about 1:30 till about 3:00. Which I have vegetables. And maybe a little bit of fish. My vegetables consist mainly of a vegetable salad. And possibly some cooked vegetables. Today, it was lima beans, eggplant, some wild mushrooms I found this morning, and some fish. All steamed together, along with a fresh vegetable salad made up of various herbs and tomatoes and stuff like that. Avocados.

VL: All from your garden?

TS: All from the gardens. And after lunch, then I fix the chickens their main meal of the day, which is protein. Coconut. And I fix the cats their food, which is store bought dog chow. But they seem to prefer the avocados more. Then, after that, I usually finish that around three or so. Then I go out and do afternoon
thing which revolves around the garden of some sort. Digging, mowing, spraying, pruning, cutting, trimming, etc. Taking care of an acre or so of ground. Keeping the jungle back and keeping the flowers blooming. I quit about 6:00, 6:30. Take my bath.

VL: Oh, where is that?

TS: Oh, I just wash off with a hose. Then I eat my dinner. Sit out and read for a few hours, or write some letters or something. Go to bed around 10 or 11. Last night, it was 11:30. That's about it. Typical.

VL: How many times a week do you leave the valley?

TS: I go up once a week, on the average. Occasionally, it's twice a week. But always it's once a week.

VL: And that's for what purpose?

TS: Well, to get kerosene. To visit with the people, talk. Go to the library. Buy a few of those munchies. That's about it. Just a day of socializing.

YY: Do you gather your mail at the top?

TS: Oh yeah. I forgot, that's very important.

VL: Are you corresponding with people on the Mainland?

TS: Oh, my golly, yeah. Gee, I sometimes wonder. Yeah, I have quite a stack of people I correspond with. From California, from coast to coast, from border to border.

VL: Have you been back, since 1970?

TS: Oh yeah. Twice. I hope to go again later this year.

VL: Have you ever worked in anybody's taro patch?

TS: Oh yeah. When I first came here, I worked a lot. Then, I don't know what it is, but I guess it's just the farmers have gotten their permanent workers. Because relatively recent, within a year or so, I've tried getting work. There isn't any. So I assume that it's just all filled up.

VL: When you first started working in the taro patch, or how did you first start? I presume that you were one of the early ones there too.

TS: Oh yeah. Just pulled weeds for George Farm. And that was it.

VL: Now, did he get resistance for having hired a "hippie?"
TS: Not that I know of. No. Well, George Farm, I don't think was really, shall we say, on the popularity list anyway. So, I....but I don't feel as though he got any extra negativism.

VL: How did you like working in the taro patch?

TS: I didn't mind the taro patch work so much. I didn't like the...for lack of words, [tape garbled] I don't know. The extras. The lack of pay, the unwillingness to want to pay us. Almost having to beg for your pay. The substandards of pay. Even not abiding to the law. And then, what finally led me to leave was being drawn into family disputes, which I wanted nothing of. But they insisted upon....in fact, some farmer still owes me $15.

VL: When was the last time that you worked in the patch? ....Rain [it is raining in the upper valley].

TS: Plenty [rain] up in the back. Really. Already that waterfall. And we haven't had hardly a thing here.

VL: Okay. Well, we'll wind it up.

TS: The last time in the taro patch was about three years ago I think. Worked for William Kanekoa. And that was very briefly, because I lost track of where they were going to pull taro. And I didn't get there till the last few bags. But it was still taro. I'm supposed to go into farming with John Loo.

VL: Sharecropping?

TS: Yeah. Right down here. The last I heard, it was supposed to be towards the end of this year.

VL: Why would you sharecrop? Why would you raise taro?

TS: I'd like to have some things that I don't have. Mainly, a jeep. My trips back to the Mainland are paid for, mostly, by my parents. And, though they don't mind, I'd rather stand more on my own two feet with those type of things. It's rather difficult getting a ride out of here. Even though there's just a lot of vehicles, you just can't seem to get a ride. So I guess it's just mainly to stand more on my own two feet.

VL: You could carry on taro farming, as well as all the gardening that you're doing now?

TS: Oh yeah. Sure. There wouldn't be any problem. Well, he's not going to give me that many patches. I think he said two or three. Oh yeah, there wouldn't be any problem. I might get a better lawn mower so it wouldn't take me so long to mow the lawn. But with the excess or the extra money that I could get I would be able to buy these so-called labor saving devices. But sometimes I wonder.
It's just peaceful the way it is. Why pour oil in the fire? But that's us mortals, we just love change.

VL: Okay, one more question. What are your plans for the future?

TS: ....I don't really have plans for the future. Because why? You know, everything could change at a drop of a hat. So, I think about it occasionally. But I have nothing more than what I'm doing right now. I'm sort of let-things-happen-as-they-happen. Because, just more gray hair. Hard to plan it.

VL: Do you consider Waipio Valley a fairly permanent home?

TS: Yes. Though I do think of, if something happened that I have to leave here. With the turmoil situation our world is in. I sort of stick that in the back of my head in case something happens. A bomb dropped on Honolulu. The Russians invading. Whatever. You think these things, you know. What would happen if this ever happened?

As far as moving back to the mainland and starting a business, I thought of that too. But not at the moment. I would have to be pushed that way. I'd have to lose this and things just fall into place that I would go that way. I wouldn't just pick up and leave here to go there.

VL: What would you not like to see happen to Waipio Valley in the future?

TS: Development, in the sense of hotels, motels. Tourists. That thing. Not that I have anything against people, but it's just there's places for those hotels. And it isn't Waipio. It would ruin it. But if it happened, I would just move. Maybe. Maybe I would sell fruit.

(Laughter)

TS: Who knows.

VL: Do you have anything else you want to add?

TS: I'm happy here. Even though there's lots of humbug. But it's just all minor local humbug. I don't mean it's the locals but it's just people. I guess that's about it.

YY: I have one question. With the waterfall flowing over there, will the river be fordable?

TS: Right now, yeah. But with the amount of rain that's falling in the back of the valley, I wouldn't stop anywhere along the way if you want to get across the river. And do be careful when you cross it.
Look both ways because this is flash flood weather. When it pours down rain in the back [of the valley], when it's white like that, it's really pumping. And you'd probably have about a half an hour.

END OF INTERVIEW